

**Evergreen Fire District
Board of Trustees
Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Regular Board Meeting of August 2nd, 2021 – 6:00 pm**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairman Fallon calls meeting to order @ 6:18 pm.

TRUSTEES IN ATTENDANCE:

Fallon	Connolly
Brockman	Gipe
Fontaine	

EFD PERSONNEL IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Williams, Fire Marshall Covington, Lt. Jared Pitcher

RECOGNIZE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:

PUBLIC COMMENT: *At this time, public may comment on any public matter that is not on the Agenda of the Meeting and that is within the jurisdiction of the District. (no comment)*

FINANCIALS:

Discuss and approve June 2021 Financials (Action)

Fallon states he thought the amount of deposits for the month of June was 'surprising' which provided a \$615,000 cash balance which drops down to approximately \$500,000 with regard to uncleared checks.

Motion; Brockman to approve the June financials as presented; second by Fontaine; passes unanimously.

PAST ITEMS/UPDATES:

1. Approve meeting minutes of July 2021 (Action)

Motion; Gipe to approve the meeting minutes of July 12th, 2021; second by Connolly; passes unanimously.

2. Un-cleared Checks Policy

Fallon states he has discussions with the current auditor and states the District can void the checks that are a year old (prior fiscal year). If a check is called into question then it will be addressed individually at that time as long as the documentation can be proven. Fallon states he will draw up a policy to be approved next month. Brockman asks if the number and amount of all checks is known. Fallon states it's less than \$1000.00 and not a big liability.

3. Employee Manual Discussion (Action)

Chief Williams states a clean copy was sent out prior to the meeting to be reviewed for approval. Fallon inquires if there is a 'Table of Contents' and Chief Williams states that there will be one added. Fallon confirms with Chief Williams that he and Fire Marshall Covington are both non-exempt, salaried employees. Fallon confirms FLSA-exempt allows personnel to work 216 hours in a 28 day pay period. Fallon explains to new trustees that this was done a few years ago to accommodate multiple 24 hours shifts without accruing overtime. Brockman asks if there is an estimate on the 'average amount of overtime a regular employee incurs'. Chief Williams states it's exceedingly rare. It would only occur if an employee was in the last week of the 28 day pay period because prior to that can be offset with time off. Chief Williams states he can get a report if trustees would like to see it. Brockman asks if there are any red flags. Chief Williams states

'Yes and no' and explains that there are some things in the budget that are in direct relation due to seeing increase of OT in some areas because of some staffing issues. Fallon states "By State Law, we can't make any employees get vaccinated." He states currently the District doesn't have a financial incentive in place. Chief Williams states that proof of vaccination will now be required for all Federal fires and will affect the District. Gipe asks what a Federal fire is and Chief Williams explains it would be Forest Service, BLM, or BIA fire on Federal grounds. He states that most fires EFD personnel go on are State fires but the larger fire (for example; CA fires) would require proof of vaccination. Fontaine asks if there are reasons personnel are not getting vaccinated to which he responds 'personal belief'. Gipe asks if there are any religious exemptions for fighting Federal fires. Chief Williams states 'for the vaccine, yes'. He states it's the same for the flu vaccine and the District has had a past employee challenge the mandate. He states he doesn't feel the District will be able to mandate Covid vaccinations and if attempted he states 'we would have a lot of job openings' but feels it could be incentivized. Fallon clarifies that what Chief Williams is saying is that even a financial incentive wouldn't change anyone's mind. Chief Williams states he doesn't know that for certain but feels the majority wouldn't take the incentive. Gipe asks how much Fallon was thinking in terms of incentive and Fallon says he hasn't given thought. Gipe asks if anyone else in the County has incentivized the vaccines. Both Chief Williams and Fallon state they aren't aware of any. Fallon states he is doubtful that \$100 would be enough incentive. Chief Williams states there are currently 49 personnel. Gipe states at \$500 as incentive would be \$25,000 and would most likely get some attention to which Fallon agrees. Fallon states it would go through payroll so they would net approximately \$400. Gipe states if the District gives personnel 500.00 it would not be up to the District to follow up on tax. Fallon states that the District would have to report it on a 1099. Fontaine states it's less than \$600 so non reportable to IRS. Brockman asks if the budget should be discussed before making the decision. Fallon states the budget can cover the cost. Chief Williams states he is support of the incentive and that the cost falls within the parameters of the revenue for 'Health and Wellness' to which Fontaine agrees. Gipe asks what 'health and wellness' is and Chief Williams states it is a program that was set up with excess wild land fire revenue to provide for PTSD and mental health counseling.

Motion; Fontaine to approve the Employee Manual; second by Brockman; passes unanimously. (30 day implementation period begins 8/3/2021)

Motion; Gipe to award \$500.00 to each employee who has gotten or gets fully vaccinated against Covid19 within this past fiscal year (ending June 30, 2021) and the current fiscal year (ending June 30, 2022) documented with card by recognized provider; second by Fontaine; 2 votes yes; Gipe and Fontaine to 2 votes no; Connolly and Brockman; Fallon breaks tie and votes yes; passes 3 to 2.

4. FY 2020 Audit Update

Chief Williams states that JCCS has everything they need to complete that audit. Cheri is tracking down a couple of reports that may or may not have been sent by Ashley to JCCS as she has recently resigned as an accountant for Stahlberg. He states he needs to finish the 'Management Action' portion and doesn't recognize anything different from previous audits by Davies with an exception of concern about the use of the signatory stamps and the location of the stamps. He states his rebuttal is that this is a small organization and makes sense for her to be responsible for the stamps as she does keep them under lock and key. He states that, as expected, JCCS listed the accounts outside the County which will continue to be a finding as long as the District keeps the enterprise funds which he does support doing. Fallon asks if Fontaine will talk with Chief Williams regarding the findings and the MDA as both are a part of her background. She states she would.

5. Fire Trustees Association Discussion (Action)

Fallon states this has to do with the \$500 dues for the statewide Trustees Association. He states the District has never paid the dues to become members. He states that there have been 2 trustees (himself and former Chair Verworn) that have gone once in past years and paid \$100 as attendees. He states he went to a meeting about 5 years ago 'to see what it was about'. He states the Fire Trustees Association doesn't have a strong lobbying group and feels the Fire Chiefs Association is a much stronger association. Brockman asks what Chief Williams input is and he states he does not see a lot of value for the Evergreen Fire District with exception of a 'first year' trustee. *(No Action taken; Board unanimously agrees the District will not participate in the Fire Trustees Association.)*

6. TrustMark Reserves Discussion (Action)

Fallon states he was not able to speak with the District's TrustMark representative due to being a foreman for a heavy equipment task force on the Hay Creek Fire all week. Fallon states there's a credit for the 7 or 8 participants of the health plans for 2020 and he would like to know how to refund the credit to the benefit of the participants. He asks "How do you get the most money at the least tax impact to the participants?" Fallon states he has asked Winston for data and has yet to receive it so he has had to look at contributions for everyone in payroll (QuickBooks) and hasn't had time to summarize the data.

(Item is tabled until September meeting)

7. Personnel & Staffing, Regular shifts & IFT shifts

Chief Williams states this item is a carry-over from the July meeting and he wants to make sure that the Board understands the struggles of the District in terms of staffing and turnover. He states there are several factors; recruitment and retention (as was discussed at the prior meeting) lack of housing limits the District to local people for recruitment and the District is competing with all other local entities. He states it comes down to 'what is the District going to provide to retain and/or recruit employees'. He states there are still 2 medic positions that have been open for at least 3 months and were advertised nationally. Gipe asks if that was starting at \$21.00 per hour and Chief Williams states "\$17 an hour and Inter-facility positions". He states that inter-facility personnel paid by mileage were converted to hourly with some employees getting promoted to full-time. He states within the last week the District has lost another primary full-time employee who was newly promoted to the position and then lost to a competitor. Fallon states she must have been willing to move and Chief Williams states that she did not move but is willing to travel to Cut Bank. He states that employees (especially inter-facility personnel) are experiencing an extreme amount of burn-out due the tremendous amount of growth to the Valley's population in a short period of time. He states it's the first time in his tenure that he has had to struggle with filling positions and acknowledges that a lot of personnel are very new and inexperienced and it takes a lot of time and energy to get them trained up. Fontaine asks if this affects mostly the EMS personnel and Chief Williams explains that the primary of the department is Fire but all firefighters are at least EMT-Basic level as a condition of employment due to EMS making up at least 80% of the call volume. Gipe asks what the starting wage is for a new hire and Chief Williams states it depends and that if a new hire comes into the department with no previous fire experience they must go through the in-house academy which can take anywhere from 3 to 5 months to complete. Gipe asks if it's 'tagging along' or a formal curriculum. Chief Williams states it is a formal curriculum which follows NFPA as well as the State Fire Training School. He adds that the in-house academy is recognized by the State. It is expected that a new hire already has EMS skills prior to applying. Gipe asks where the EMS training is usually gotten and Chief Williams lists; Best Practice and Community College. EMT program is approximately 3 months to complete with the paramedic program being a 2 year Associates Degree. Brockman asks about the cost of the EMT program and is told approximately \$1200.00 and \$6,000.00 for Para-medicine. Brockman asks if an employee is reimbursed upon completion for the program and Chief Williams states it is not but that it used to be. Brockman asks if retention is primarily a wage issue or could possibly be a 'cultural or reputation issue'. His point being that everyone is

having a wage issue. Chief Williams states that Evergreen is a complex department in terms of revenue generation in regard to having as robust an inter-facility program. He states that shift officers/duty officers are on the phone several hours a day making inter-facility transport arrangements as well as the daily training. Chief Williams states that officers would not be tasked with this at any other department. Brockman asks if a coordinator position should be in charge of the IFT's and scheduling. Chief Williams states that position was just added to the budget. He states that he is hoping the Board will approve an increase in personnel wages and hope to be able to increase benefits in the future. Gipe asks if any fire districts in the Valley are offering housing. Chief Williams describes a 'sleeper program' being used in French Town where they provide the housing in lieu of compensation for working shifts. He states that he has talked with other Fire Chiefs and they are also having difficulty with recruitment and retention due to the current housing crisis. Fallon states if the burn prop behind Station 81 was moved up to Station 82 the District could put in 4 apartments with 2 bedrooms in each unit; or leave the burn prop at Station 81 and build housing units behind Station 82. There will be future discussion regarding the potential for housing units. In following up with Brockman, Fallon states it would probably be best to have an independent party perform exit interviews of personnel who have left EFD in the past 6 months and then provide Chief Williams with a summary of both positive and negative aspects of working for Evergreen Fire District. Chief Williams states that he has followed up with personnel by giving an exit interview and reasons range from interpersonal conflicts with other personnel; to wages and housing; to culture and "being a fun place to work". Chief Williams states that he doesn't think EFD is 'a fun place to work' anymore for personnel as the department has grown much busier with less 'down time' and more demands being made. He states the department has lost some of the 'family feel'; especially since onset of Covid over a year ago. Brockman poses the question to Chief Williams "What can you and your management team do to reinvigorate some of the volunteer culture?" He states he doesn't want an answer at this moment. Chief Williams states he has a couple of answers and Fontaine states she would like to hear them. Chief Williams states that due to the exponential growth and busy-ness, the value of the employees seems to be forgotten. He also feels that all personnel need to be given something that they are responsible for within the organization so that everyone feels they have a purpose. Currently, 5 people are in charge of everything. Fallon asks if Lynda Brown could perform the exit interviews and Chief Williams agrees because she is easily approachable. Fallon and Chief Williams agree that she does a great job with summarizing reports in an objective and constructive way. Fallon asks if there should be a motion and Chief Williams asks that it go on the Agenda for the next meeting so he can consult with Lynda.

Fontaine states she would be interested in knowing how much turn-over is due to low wages vs. drama vs. overworked due to different solutions for each cause. She supports creating an IFT Coordinator position and supports promoting individual responsibilities.

8. Budget Discussion and Approval (Action)

Fallon starts the discussion with a 5 year history with graphs showing call volume by Fire and EMS. He states in 2017, EFD averaged 6.6 calls per day; then 7.7; then 8; then 8.8; then up to 10.4. Fontaine asks if the influx of population is known. Fallon states the call volume would have to be broken out by call volume within the District to the call volume outside of the District and the information could come from County GIS. Fontaine states if EFD is getting many out of district calls then it should come back to EFD financially. Fallon states the District gets reimbursed on the calls but Kalispell and Creston will never pay the District for responding because of the mutual aid contracts. Fire Marshall Covington states the City of Kalispell doesn't need the EMS calls like EFD does. Chief Williams states the City of Kalispell is paid through taxes so they don't have to rely on EMS transport revenue. Gipe asks if other departments' fire curve reflects EFD's curve and Chief Williams states most departments are 80% EMS vs. 20% Fire. He adds that EFD responds to any fires within the City of Kalispell. Fallon moves on to

'Total Call Volume' and 'Total Expenditures' and states expenditures increased due to the voted levy that allowed more money for staffing. He states that over the last 12 months the calls increased more than expenditures. Fontaine asks if EMS and FIRE expenses can be differentiated and is told yes. She expresses the absurdity that EMS is not considered an essential service in the State of Montana. She states that EMS services need to start pushing to pass legislation to make them essential. Gipe asks what the implication is and Fontaine tells him there is a lot more funding if considered an essential service. Gipe asks what the budgetary impact would be if favorable legislation was passed. Fontaine states 'It would be huge and I'm ready to start talking to some of those legislators.' Fallon moves on to show 'medical' and 'tax' revenues with tax revenue used primarily for fire with some EMS use (permissive levy). Fallon shows there is 4.5 months of income to cover the time period and points out the maximum that can legally be held in the account. He states anything over 33% is excess and historically had gone into 7250 (CIP). He states \$10,000 would be set aside for a portable camera system to cover outside trainings and put into a media library for certifying EFD firefighters. Chief Williams states it would be used for online business meetings and training. The need for the equipment (and software) has been recognized due to Covid. Fallon states that leaves \$70,000 which would budgeted under 'garage doors'; 'ventilation'; and 'security'. He explains that the security system is 11 years old and the vendor is not willing to support it any longer and the ventilation system (which they are supposed to help support) puts blame on HVAC for issues with it not turning on and off as it should. Fallon then states that after the discussions of this meeting, ideas have opened up further as to the use of \$81,000. Gipe suggests pricing out the cost of building the housing for personnel and states it seems like there should be money available and suggests looking at grants. Brockman asks what type of outside camera equipment is being looked at and Chief Williams states he would be happy with the GoPro but whatever equipment is purchases needs to be portable and have a tripod and high quality audio (for outside trainings) and easy to use. Fontaine suggests using the revenue for whatever is highest on the priority list. Chief Williams states that currently the video security is a high priority and Fallon states it was categorized in with garage doors, ventilation and security system with \$70,000 allocated. Fallon explains that the ventilation system, garage, doors, security doors and cameras were integrated and proprietary when initially installed over 10 years ago. He suggests going with something more generic and avoid proprietary setups. Fallon states that due to time constraints the typed resolutions are not available for the meeting. He states the guidance is what to do with the \$81,000 excess in 7204. If it's to transfer to 7250 then another line item would be added equivalent of \$81,000 and identified as 'security'. Fallon states there's \$478,000 in revenue cash coming into 7250. County shows the following cash; 7204 - \$614,000; 7207 - \$31,000; 7250 - \$237,000 (\$240,000 actual); 7288 (Bond Service Debt Fund) - \$78,000. Fallon states the District is budgeted to spend \$205,000 (without the \$81,000) with the amount being transferred in under 7204. He states the Hydrant Fund (7207) has \$13,000 going in with \$30,000 already in it for a total of \$43,000 with \$15,000 being transferred to 7250. Labor costs and hydrant maintenance comes out of the fund and fund is allowed to retain \$11,000. Fontaine asks who the authority is that sets the fund allowances and Fallon states it's 33% by State Law to cover the 4 months remaining for the year. Fallon continues with the Department Fund (4212) and the Benevolent Fund and states neither go to the County but still have to be approved. He explains that when the Department Fund is low; wild land money (as opposed to tax payer money) is put into the account but is not currently low on funds. He states the ambulance account pays for Pintler billing services with \$23,000 cash in the account. Fallon moves on to the Benevolent Fund and states there is approximately \$12,000 and is used for personnel hardships. Brockman asks to re-address the wage discussion. Fallon states that since the last discussion one line item was removed because 'on call' was not needed for personnel responding within the county because they will be paid hourly; responding outside of County will be on call. He states there will need to be enough revenue to cover four 24 hour shifts on the 4 busiest days during the week and then on call for the other 3 days. Covington

states it will help to reduce personnel 'burn out'. Pay increase will be \$2.50 each instead of \$2.00. IFT Coordinator will be a new position and will be .50 above regular pay. Brockman states he is in favor of giving sustainable raises instead of money here and there. Chief Williams states that "Sustainable is the key word. This year has been a stellar year but there's no way of knowing if that will continue. These raises are a 'thank you' based on a stellar year and can't be expected every year here after." Connolly suggests that raising wages may not be enough to gain retention of personnel and Chief Williams states that is why the benefits, particularly IRA match (3%), should be reconsidered when looking at the participation in the SIMPLE IRA and medical plans. Trustees agree that benefits should be re-evaluated in the near future. Connolly wants to see Fire Marshall Covington and Chief Williams be eligible for a raise since neither could receive one last year. Brockman asks about the administrative assistant and is told she has also been counted in. Fallon clarifies that approving 7204 will be with the understanding that approximately \$222,000 will be going to 7250.

NEW ITEMS:

1. Accounting Firm Discussion

Fallon states that our prior accountant at Stahlberg resigned her position within the last 30 days and now has another accountant at Stahlberg handling the account. Chief Williams has asked that the new accountant be given 30 days to prove she can provide the level of service that the previous accountant gave the District. Her first payroll for the District will be tomorrow.

RESOLUTIONS:

1. 2021-01 Budget Approval for Fund 7204 General Fund Account FY2022
Brockman; motion to approve 7204 with the understanding approximately \$222,000 will transfer to 7250; second by Fontaine; passes unanimously.
2. 2021-02 Budget Approval for Fund 7207 Hydrant Account FY2022
Fontaine; motion to approve 7207 with the understanding that \$15,000 will be transferred to 7250 and anything in excess of the 1/3 will also be transferred to 7250; second by Brockman; passes unanimously.
3. 2021-03 Budget Approval for Fund 7250 Capital Outlay Account FY2022
Brockman; motion to approve Capital Improvement Fund 7250 with the understanding that \$222,000 will be received from 7204 and \$15,000 from 7207; Second by Fontaine; passes unanimously.
4. 2021-04 Budget Approval for Fund 7288 Repayment Account FY2022
Fontaine; motion to approve 7288 Bond Repayment Fund; Second by Connolly; passes unanimously.
5. 2021-05 Budget Approval for Fund 9428 Ambulance Account FY2022
Brockman; motion to approve 9428 with the understanding the cash balance of no less than \$25,000; Second by Fontaine; passes unanimously.
6. 2021-06 Budget Approval for Fund 4212 Department Account FY2022
Gipe; motion to approve Department Fund 4212 as is and with no additional funds being added other than donations less than \$100; Second by Connolly; passes unanimously.
7. 2021-07 Budget Approval for Benevolent Fund FY2022
Connolly; motion to approve Benevolent Fund; Second by Gipe; passes unanimously.

CHIEF'S REPORT:

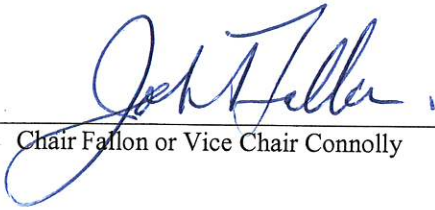
1. June 2021 Call Volume

A) Comparison Incident Count by Weekday/Hour (all zones) for June 2021

B) Comparison Incident Statistics for June 2021

Chief Williams states that June 2021 there were 269 EMS calls vs. 231 last year; 60 Fire calls during June 2021 vs. 32 last year. Year to date; 1529 EMS calls vs. 1359 calls last year. IFT's show 145 calls for June 2021 vs. 107 last year with year to date IFT's at 850 calls vs. 658 this time last year.

Adjourn *The President of the Board of Trustees, as presiding officer of any meeting of the Board of Trustees, may close the meeting during the time the discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy; and, then, if, and only if, the presiding officer determines that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure. The right of individual privacy may be waived by the individual about whom the discussion pertains; and, in that event, the meeting must be open.*



Chair Fallon or Vice Chair Connolly

Secretary Brockman

